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THE
CONFLAGRATION,
A POEM,
WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED FOR THE
BENEFIT OF THE SUFFERERS
BY THE
Recent Disastrous Fires
IN THE
PROVINCE OF NEW BRUNSWICK.

BY **GEORGE MANNERS, ESQUIRE,**
BRITISH CONSUL IN MASSACHUSETTS.

"Sentitur plerisque prius quam cernitur ignis
"Excitis somno; multorumque ora vocantum
"Auxilium invadunt flamme."

SILIUS ITALICUS.

BOSTON:
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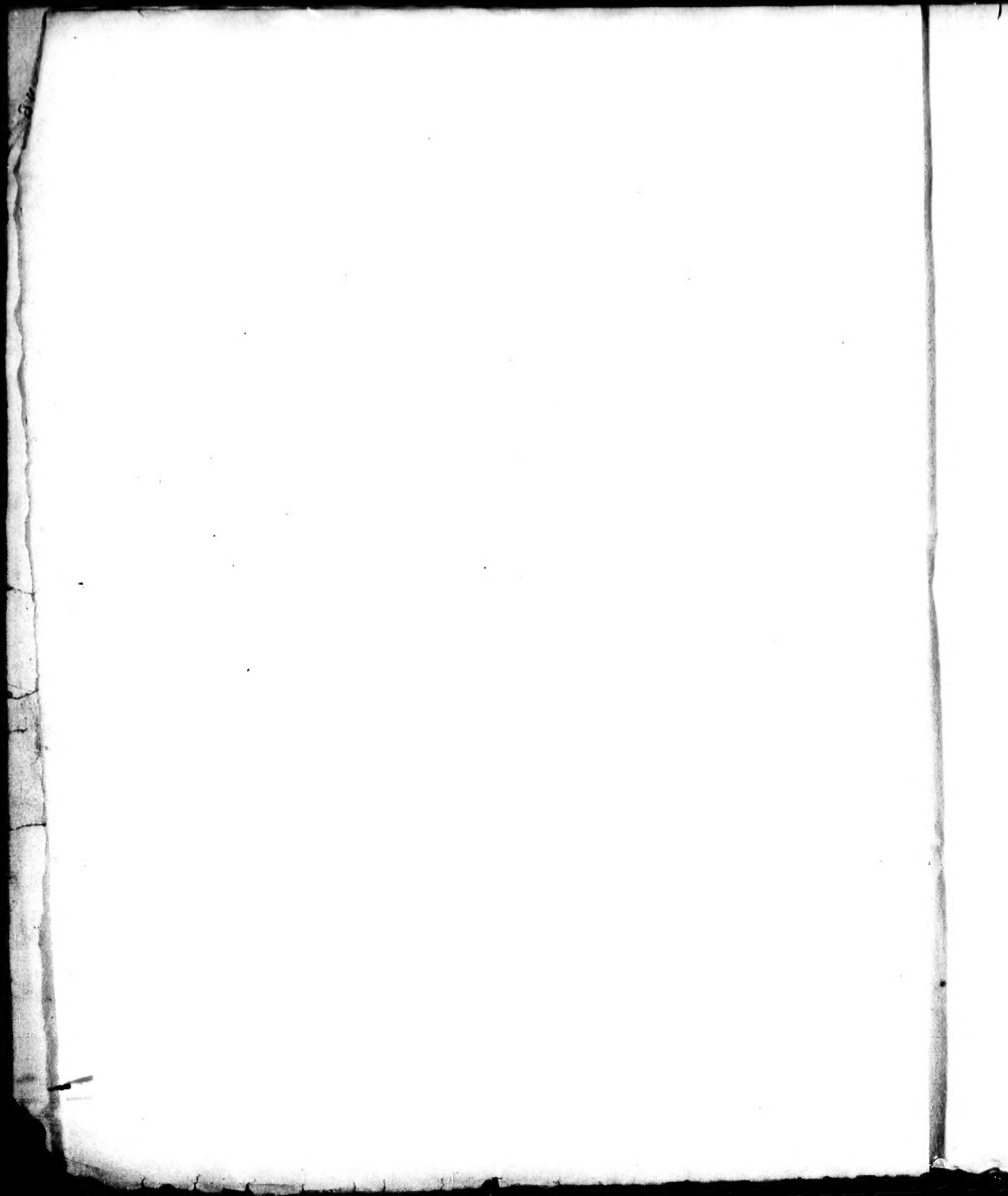
1825.

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DEDICATION.

To the Citizens of Boston, the prompt and munificent consolers of the afflicted, whose Benevolence it is difficult adequately to panegyryze, and impossible to exaggerate, I dedicate this Poem.

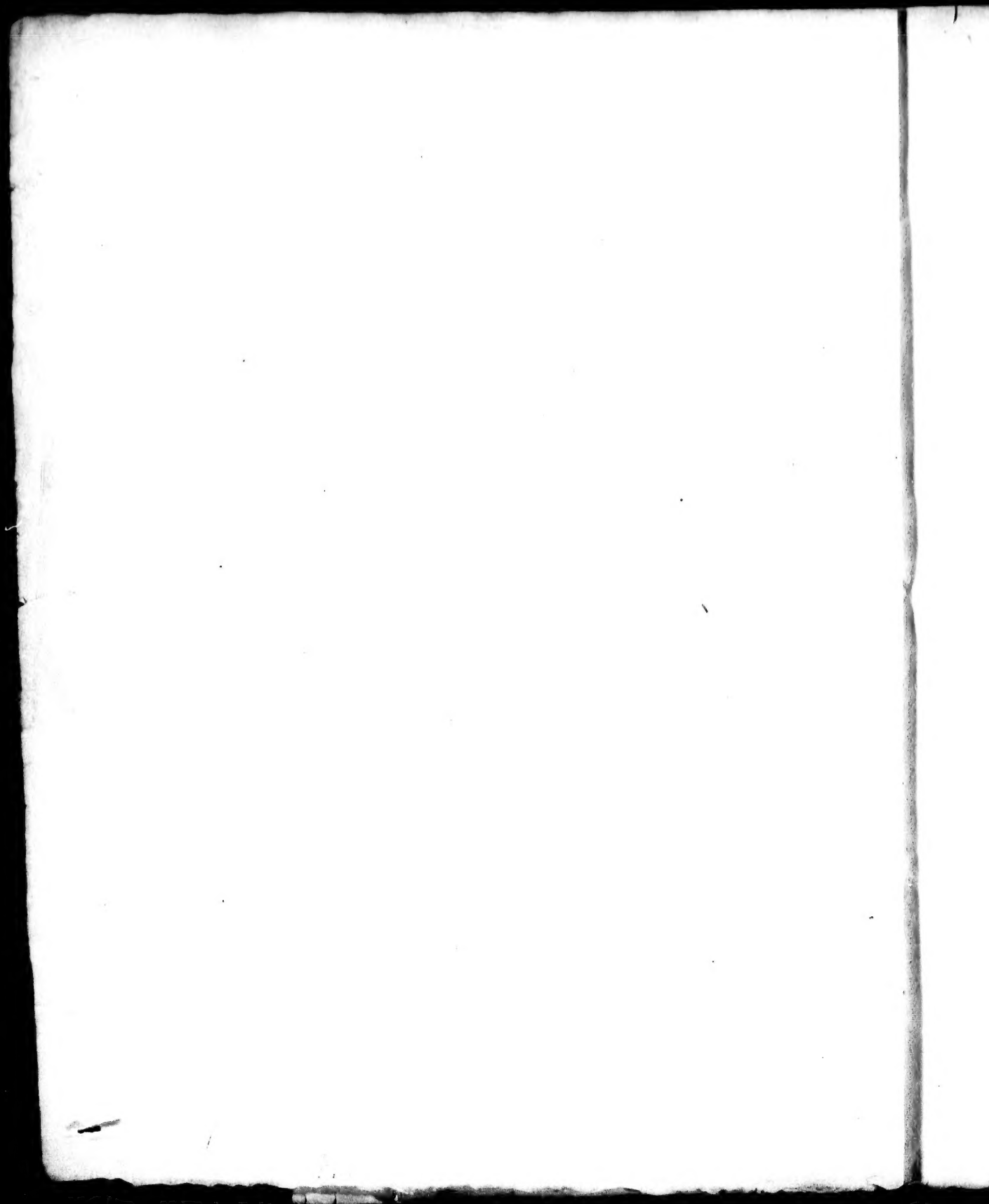
GEORGE MANNERS.



PREFACE.

IN the following lines two poetical essentials are wanting—*SIMILE* and *FICITION*. Such is the horrific sublimity of its subject, that the former could not have been easily introduced without diminishing the Grandeur of Description; and such the affecting incidents of actual suffering to which it alludes, that the latter would, in a great measure, have destroyed the interest and sympathy which they are calculated to excite.

A *Simile*, in heroic or descriptive poetry, should always elevate and enlarge our ideas of that with which it is compared; but neither the fancy of a Poet nor the realities of Nature could furnish an image equal, in horror and magnificence, to an Ocean of Flame, agitated and impelled by its attendant Hurricane, consuming forests and spreading devastation and destruction over millions of acres:—Such, alas! was the dreadful dispensation of Providence with which the miserable inhabitants of New Brunswick were recently visited—such the unparalleled horrors which I have attempted to describe. I feel (and who would not?) very inadequate to the task of doing justice to the afflicting subject; all that I have related is, however, according to the best information that I have been able to obtain, substantially correct, and I am confident that my motives will be justly appreciated by a sympathizing and benevolent Public.



THE CONFLAGRATION.

"Horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent."

VING. EN. 2-755.

WHAT bosom bleeds not o'er th' historic page
Which tells the horrors of a former age,
When Herculaneum's and Pompeii's domes
Sunk simultaneous in their flaming tombs;
When the Earth yawn'd convulsed, and, in one grave,
Perish'd, engulph'd, Patrician—Freeman—Slave,—
The letter'd Sage, the Maid in beauty's pride,
Th' exulting Bridegroom and his blooming Bride,
Th' unconscious Infant at its Mother's breast,
The honor'd Matron and the Lord she blest?—
—Sad tale of woe!—But, ah, the time has come
To weep severer horrors nearer home!

Lo! a dense cloud obscures the Northern skies,—
 Hark! from New Brunswick, piercing shrieks arise;
 The wild deer starts astonish'd from his lair,
 The soaring eagle seeks a purer air,
 The wand'ring woodman stays his sturdy stroke,
 His breath impeded by impervious smoke;
 The moose, the bear, the wolf, rush mingled by,
 And scared and screaming birds around him fly!
 A fearful warning of his dreadful fate—
 He strives to fly—but, ah, he strives too late;
 In vain Despair his waning strength renews,
 A flood of Flame on wings of Wind pursues—
 Exhausted, panting, to the Earth he falls,
 On his lov'd wife and helpless children calls:
 But wife, alas, nor child again shall hear
 The tender accents of that voice so dear:
 O'erta'en, enveloped by the ruthless fires,
 The wretched man in agony expires!

The blazing Deluge through the forest pours,
 His fell ally, the fierce Tornado, roars;
 Nor stream nor mountain their dire course restrains,
 They burst, at length, upon the peopled plains!

Horror of horrors!—can the Muse pourtray
 The matchless anguish of the dreadful day?
 Can the tongue utter—can the pen relate,
 In language adequate, the horrid fate
 Of the devoted towns?—With wild amaze
 Through the black smoke they see the flick'ring blaze;
 Its pitchy fumes corrupt the ambient air,—
 A moment's left them—left them—to despair!
 Hark! hark! those loud, those agonizing cries!
 A mother's voice!—her stifled infant dies!
 She clasps its corse, repeats its darling name,
 Reckless she hears approach the crackling flame;
 Her husband rushes to their aid too late,—
 He cannot save them—but he shares their fate!
 Lo! midst the fires, one darting in despair!—
 His only child, dear pledge of Love, is there!
 Nature impels him with resistless force,
 In vain the flames oppose his frantic course—
 He gains his threshold!—for a moment blest,
 He clasps his son, exulting, to his breast;
 He flies again across the torrid plains,—
 His vig'rous arm the precious charge sustains;—

Hope gives new energy,—fond hope to see
 His child again embrace a mother's knee,—
 She, haply absent, lives to share his joy
 If to her arms he bear their lovely boy!
 Vain hope, alas!—No more that child shall bless
 A mother's heart—no more her bosom press!—
 The raging elements more swiftly speed,
 The smoth'ring fumes the infant's lungs impede;
 The frenzied parent marks its lab'ring breath,—
 Convulsed it struggles in the grasp of Death!
 Ye, who have seen a parching fever doom
 Your only infant to an early tomb,
 Watch'd by its couch with agony intense,
 Mark'd its now wand'ring,—now returning sense,
 Bent to receive its feeble, fond embrace—
 Hoped, while the hectic flush illumed its face,—
 Hopeless beheld the transient color fly,
 Its cheek grow pale, and dim its gazeless eye,
 Heard the last flutt'ring of its ebbing breath,
 And witness'd all the horrors of its death,
 Ye, only ye, are privileged to know
 The father's dire pre-eminence of woe—

Your hearts a kindred sympathy will own
For those afflictions which ye once have known.

Confusion—Terror—Uproar—Frenzy—Strife,
Mar every effort in defence of life—
A horrid din of shrieks and groans and yells,
The pangs of suff'ring hundreds sadly tells—
Crowds through the trackless woods attempt to fly,
The flames outstrip them—they are doom'd to die.
Some, headlong plunging in the foaming waves,
Exchange the fun'ral pyre for wat'ry graves!
A lucky few escape the torrid beach
On planks of pine, and doubtful safety reach.

Hope, ye survivors, hope!—See o'er the surge
Yon succ'ring bark the dauntless seamen urge—
—Strain ev'ry sinew to impel the oar!
Quick! or they perish ere ye gain the shore!
Forward she presses!—but, alas, how small!—
Who shall remain?—She can't receive them all!
Yet all rush to her—Cease that horrid strife!
Ah, who can blame them?—they contend for life!—

Frantic they cling to the receding boat,
 Oppress'd and crowded, she can scarcely float;
 Numbers convulsively the gunwale clasp,
 The oarsmen free it from their fatal grasp,—
 Self-preservation hardens ev'ry breast,—
 A part must perish to preserve the rest—
 Heart-rending scene!—For them Hope's cheering ray
 Beam'd but a moment, flatt'ring to betray:
 Short, though severe, their suff'rings—in the deep
 Their pangs are ended—and they cease to weep.

Now glow the waves with rafts of burning pine,
 And all the merchant's floating riches join
 To feed th' insatiate fires—Rock'd on the tide,
 Far from the beach his gallant vessels ride—
 Still insecure—nor space nor waters yield
 Against the rav'ning pest a guardian shield;
 The burning embers, spread by furious gales,
 Descend in show'rs and fasten on their sails;
 Their blazing masts the glowing deep illumine,
 Their crews desert them, and the flames consume—
 Stores, wharves and docks, the gen'ral ravage share,
 And all is ruin, horror and despair!

At length the whirlwind's hush'd; the welcome rains }
 Descend in torrents on the hissing plains, }
 The blaze expires—but Misery remains!
 So deep, so poignant the survivors' grief,
 Escape from death is scarcely deem'd relief—
 Parents their children—children parents mourn,
 Wives weep for lords that never will return—
 Lovers the loved—friends, slaughter'd friends deplore,—
 The tend'rest ties are rent to join no more.

Drear, parch'd and desolate, in horrid guise,
 Surrounding scenes accord with streaming eyes—
 Ashes lie scatter'd,—recent cinders smoke
 Where wav'd the pine and tow'r'd the monarch oak;
 Their blasted trunks in rifted ruin stand,
 Black, charr'd and branchless, they deform the land
 They once adorn'd.—Scorch'd, mangled, sear'd and dead,
 The herds lie prostrate where they lately fed:
 Ormucto's stream a hideous group pollutes,
 The sodden carcasses of men and brutes—
 These urg'd by Instinct, and by Reason those,
 Assur'd of death, the milder agent chose—

Not e'en the natives of the flood were spared,
 The stifled shoals the gen'ral havoc shared;
 Lifeless they float along the neighb'ring strand,
 Or lie, in putrid myriads, on the sand;*
 An universal devastation reigns
 Through ev'ry hill, and saddens all the plains.

Though the full tide of gen'ral anguish flow,
 The heart will dwell on individual woe,
 And own a warmer sympathy for grief,
 Beyond the reach of solace or relief—
 Such as yon wretched youth's,—without control
 Sorrow triumphant revels in his soul—
 He in a moment reach'd Grief's utmost bourne,
 Chief mourner he, where all are doom'd to mourn.

*All that Homer feigned of the *Scamander* was realized by the rivers of New Brunswick. Innumerable salmon and other fish, stifled by the smoke or destroyed by the excessive heat of the atmosphere, were cast lifeless upon their shores. To describe this circumstance, with any degree of poetical effect, I found extremely difficult: Fish, save "the enormous Monsters of the Deep," are by no means "*a subject of the Sublime*:" Even *Pope* has failed in his translation of the passage to which I have above alluded; indeed, the lustre of the Greek language seems necessary to embellish the description:—his version is as follows:

" ————— the fishes pant for breath,
 " The eels lie twisting in the pangs of death,
 " Now flounce aloft, now dive the scaly fry,
 " Or, gasping, turn their bellies to the sky."

POPE. IL. 21 v. 412.

From Erin's isle, on wings of Love, he fled
 With the dear partner of his bridal bed:
 Long had they loved, and long they sought to gain
 A father's sanction to their vows, in vain;
 Proud of his wealth, th' obdurate parent strove,
 By ev'ry art, to thwart their blameless love;
 Though ev'ry charm adorn'd her beauteous face,
 Though her form boasted ev'ry winning grace,
 Though purity of thought and taste refined
 Beam'd in her eye,—the index of her mind,
 One charm alone could his consent secure,
 That one she wanted—she, alas, was poor!
 Love proved resistless,—the fond lover prest,
 And mutual faith a secret marriage blest.
 Far o'er the Western main they sought repose—
 In doom'd New Brunswick's woods their cottage rose;
 There Peace and Love, awhile, dwelt unrestrain'd,
 And bliss, which fiction feigns, was there attain'd.
 Alas, while all was happiness and joy,
 Fate seal'd her dire commission to destroy:
 He, on the morning of the fatal day,
 Had launch'd his shallop in the neighb'ring bay:

A parting tear had gemm'd her beauteous face,
 A sigh escaped her in their last embrace,—
 (Alas, their last indeed!)—a boding gloom
 Oppress'd his bosom as he left his home,—
 The weakness still unwilling to betray,
 Towards the beach he bent his lonely way.
 Scarce had his bark approach'd the adverse shore,
 When his ear caught the rising whirlwind's roar—
 He sees the fires illumine the stormy West!—
 Horror and anguish fasten on his breast;
 Still hope he cherishes!—Avenging Heav'n
 Had never mortal heart so sorely riv'n,—
 Her angel virtues must protect his wife,
 The flames must spare so pure, so dear a life!—
 Such are his maniac thoughts—Alas, how vain!—
 That wife his arms shall never clasp again—
 Helpless she shrieks, the all-devouring flame
 Feeds on her charms and racks her tender frame;
 Her husband hears not her heart-rending cries,
 Writhing, alone, the lovely sufferer dies.

The storm is pass'd—the adverse winds no more
 Repel his efforts to regain the shore.

Wing'd with Despair, he rushes to the spot
 Where late he left her in his happy cot,—
 But wife nor cot now bless his anxious eyes—
 All, all in one sad ruin mingled lies.
 Speechless the miserable maniac stands,
 Extending Heav'nwards his imploring hands.
 With vacant gaze regards the horrid heap
 Of smould'ring ruins—but he *cannot* weep:—
 His heart rejects the desolating truth
 That she, so lately gay in health and youth,
 So fair, so pure, so lovely and so loved,
 She whose affections he so often proved,
 Is lost—forever lost!—her beauteous form
 Scatter'd in ashes by the ruthless storm!
 Thus on some leafless branch or rugged stone
 Sits the sad eagle, desolate and lone,
 Gazes intently on the fatal spot
 Where his mate perish'd by the recent shot,
 Throws his far-darting eye across the heath,
 Vainly expecting her return from death.

Turn we our eyes from these soul-harrowing sights
 To scenes in which Humanity delights:

Though Famine gaunt, with fell destruction rife,
 Rushes relentless against suffering Life,
 Lo! mild Benevolence* presents her shield
 And drives the rav'ning monster from the field;
 From ev'ry breast extracts the venom'd dart,
 And pours her balm on ev'ry bleeding heart.
 All hail! thou noblest attribute of man,
 Thou grand essential in the social plan
 Of Nature—O, may thy bland influence bind
 In one vast family all human kind,
 Soften asperities of kindred States,
 Blot out all traces of unnat'ral hates,
 Conciliate feelings lib'ral, just and kind,
 And re-unite the ties by feuds disjoin'd!

* It might, perhaps, appear invidious to mention individual instances of Liberality and Benevolence; I may, however, be allowed to observe that, munificent as the contributions of affluent individuals resident in Boston have been, much larger sums were, as I have been informed, proffered by them, which were, however, very properly declined, by the Committee appointed to conduct the Subscription, lest their acceptance should have excited unpleasant and disadvantageous feelings in the bosoms of those whose means were not so adequate to the manifestation of their equally humane dispositions. The sums collected at the various places of worship, in Boston and its vicinity, furnish a delightful proof that all Christian Sects unite in the practice of Benevolence.